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Arizona Republic (Phoenix, Arizona) · Fri, Nov 9, 2001 · Page 197
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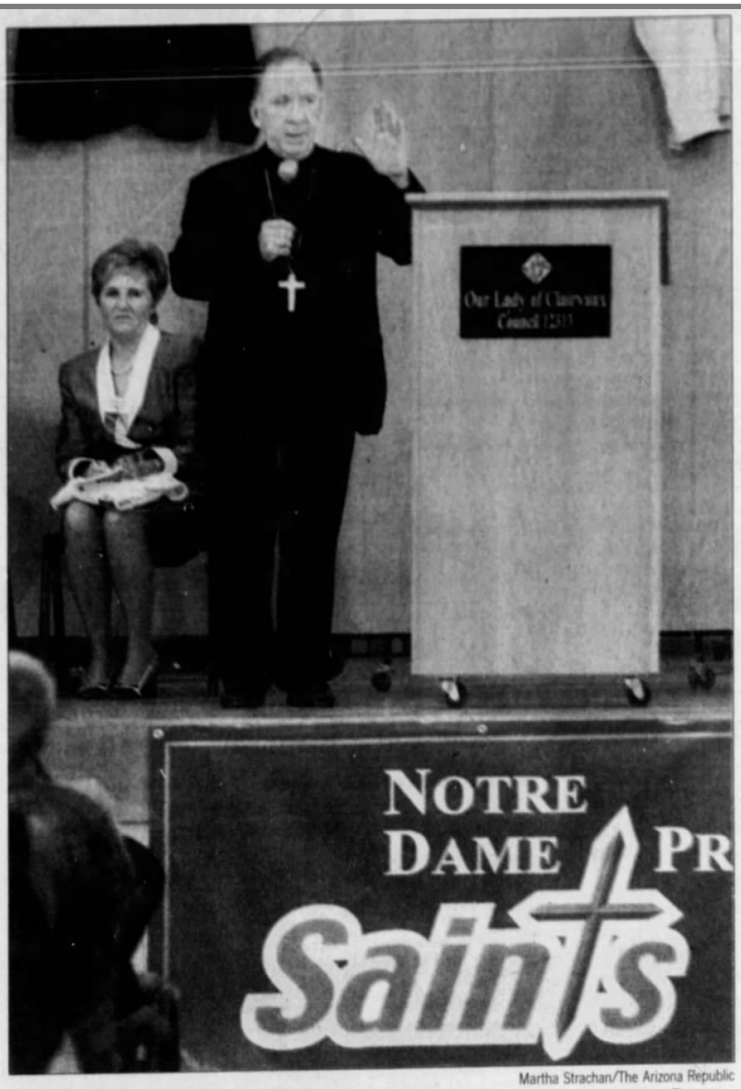

Martha Strachan/The Arizona Republic

Bishop Thomas J. O'Brien addresses a crowd before a tour of the new Notre Dame Preparatory High School. The school will open next August.

New Catholic school drawing attention

By Anne Ryman
The Arizona Republic

School officials say parent interest has been "overwhelming" for a new Catholic high school that will open next fall in Scottsdale.

Close to 900 people attended two open houses in October and November at Notre Dame Preparatory High School, 9701 E. Bell Road. A third open house is planned from noon to 2 p.m. Jan. 13.

The private school will open with 450 freshmen and sophomores. A junior class will be added in 2003 and a senior class in 2004. Plans call for 1,200 students at capacity.

Officials predict there will be great demand for another Catholic high school in the Valley, and the Diocesan School Board has made opening Notre Dame one of its top priorities.

Notre Dame will be the first Catholic high school to open in the Valley in 47 years and the fifth one operated by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix. The diocese also oversees Xavier College Prepara-

See **PARENTS** Page 5

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Arizona Republic (Phoenix, Arizona) · Fri, Nov 9, 2001 · Page 201
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Photos by Martha Strachan/The Arizona Republic

Westin Marshall, 13, who plans to attend Notre Dame Preparatory School, looks over an information packet.

PARENTS Interest strong in new Catholic school

From Page 1

tory, St. Mary's and Bourgade high schools in Phoenix and Seton High School in Chandler. The diocese closed Gerard High School at 44th and Oak streets in Phoenix in 1989 because of budget constraints and declining enrollment.

The red-brick Notre Dame campus has a sweeping view of the McDowell Mountains and is near the Alltel Ice Den and WestWorld of Scottsdale. The 30-acre site school site will undergo a $9 million to $10 million renovation between now and August. A gym, chapel and 16 classrooms will be added to the site, which was formerly the private TesseracT School. The diocese bought the property for $17 million in March after the TesseracT Group filed for bankruptcy.

Principal David Gonsalves will spend the next year hiring teachers, meeting with prospective students and giving presentations at local parishes.

Prospective students must take an entrance exam Jan. 19 and interview with the principal. Applicants will be notified March 1 if they are accepted.

"I believe our curriculum will be more stringent compared to a regular high school," Gonsalves said. "Our goal is to send 100 percent of our kids on to higher education."

Notre Dame plans eight class periods a day, while many public schools have six or seven periods. The school will demand 28 credits to graduate. Many public high schools require 23 or 24 credits.

The school will have a full athletics program and student clubs. Other activities will be added depending on student interest, said Carolyn Rock, the school's director of development.

Across the United States, 627,877 students attended Catholic high schools in the 2000-01 school year, 6 percent more than a decade ago, according to the Washington, D.C.-based National Catholic Education Association.

Despite the increasing enrollment, it's not a simple task to start a new school and keep it running.

Although 54 new Catholic schools opened in the United States this past school year, 61 were closed or consolidated.

Because Notre Dame is a parochial school, it is ineligible for state funding and must rely on tuition, private donations and fund-raisers. Tuition ranges from $6,500 to $8,500 a year, depending on whether families are registered and active in their parishes.

Spiritual life is an important part of the campus, Rock said. Classes and student activities begin with prayer, and four credits of theology courses are required for graduation. Students also will be required to complete 100 hours of community service. For information, call (480) 515-0060.

Reach the reporter at anne.ryman@arizonarepublic.com or (602) 444-6881.

Parents Interest Strong In New Catholic School

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